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The Charlotte Observer

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CHARLOTTE CITY COUNCIL

City leaders looking at 4-year terms, higher pay

BY STEVE HARRISON
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Several Charlotte City Council members want to either increase their pay or switch to four-year terms instead of running for re-election every two years, despite recent skepticism from voters about longer terms. Council members say the changes would help them better serve residents.

Both ideas have been discussed informally for several years, but new at-large council member Braxton Winston brought the issue up during his first regular meeting Monday.

"Look, I know Mayberry is set in North Carolina, but Charlotte is no Mayberry," he said. "The people in Charlotte should have a full-time government."

Winston, a Democrat, said council members are essentially serving people for only the first year of their two-year term because "every two years you have to run for office."

Winston said he would like to see staggered four-year terms. Council members who represent districts would be on the ballot, say, in 2018 and 2022. Council members elected citywide would be on the ballot in 2020 and 2024. The mayor could also be on the ballot with at-large council members.

"The people deserve it, businesses deserve it, (city) staff deserves it," Winston said. "I hope we are willing to have a politically difficult conversation."

Democrat LaWana Mayfield, who represents District 3, has periodically floated the idea of four-year terms since she was elected in 2011.

Council members can set their own pay and change the length of their terms on their own, without General Assembly or voter approval. Mayfield said she hopes her colleagues explore the idea.

"We have the political ability," she said. "Do we have the political will?"

Council members make $19,809 in salary, plus a general expense allowance of $5,800, a $4,000 auto allowance and a $3,100 technology allowance each year. Their total pay is $32,709.

SEE CITY COUNCIL, 2A

SPORTS

COACH PRICE OUT AT CHARLOTTE

Just nine games into the season, the Charlotte 49ers fired men's basketball coach Mark Price. **1B**

Cardinal Innovations HEALTHCARE

LOCAL

CARDINAL CASE PROMPTS SUIT

Former leaders file suit, saying the state has no authority to take over Cardinal Innovations and remove the board. **4A**

BUSINESS

COAL ASH TURNS UP IN ODD SPOTS

For decades, coal ash was used as structural fill. It can turn up under road beds, parking lots and other locations. **8A**

Good Friends raise $412,482 for families 'on the brink of calamity'

PHOTOS BY DAVIE HINSHAW dhinshaw@charlotteobserver.com

Participants pack the house at the Good Friends Charlotte luncheon Thursday at the Charlotte Civic Center. Even a small amount of money – a month's rent, help with utility bills, boxes of diapers – can make a big difference to families in need, the local women's organization says.

BY JANE WESTER
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Think of families living "on the brink of calamity," a woman asked a full ballroom at the Charlotte Convention Center on Thursday.

Even a small amount of money – a month's rent, help with utility bills, boxes of diapers – can make a big difference to those families, the local women's organization Good Friends Charlotte says.

"For our friends, they are literally on the edges, and all they need is one more little thing," luncheon chairwoman Sonja Nichols told the crowd.

Good Friends raised $412,482 through its 31st annual luncheon Thursday, including $275,082 in personal donations from luncheon attendees. All of that money goes to families in need, Good Friends president Joanne Beam said. (Overhead costs are paid by members' annual dues.)

In 2017, more than half the donations helped families with rent or utility bills. The rest paid for medical expenses, transportation, summer camp scholarships – and everyday household items like clothing, mousetraps and sturdy locks for survivors of domestic violence.

Joanne O'Brien Beam hugs longtime employee Polly Needham, who is retiring, after telling her that the Good Friends camp scholarships are now named the Polly Needham Scholarships.

Sonja Nichols gets the crowd excited at the annual Good Friends Charlotte luncheon Thursday.

At the luncheon, members shared stories of the people they helped this year. They included a woman who needed diapers and clean bottles so she could finish school with a newborn and a man who became disabled, lost his job and couldn't pay his water bill.

Occasionally, Good Friends gets checks from people they helped years ago who want to pay back the money, Beam said. Or they hear from previous recipients about the difference a small, long-ago donation made in their lives. One woman at Thursday's luncheon got a round of applause because she's graduating from nursing school in the spring, several years after Good Friends helped her buy a dress for a high school awards ceremony.

Good Friends works with 80 organizations to identify people in need, including Goodwill, Crisis Assistance and Charlotte Family Housing.

"With the families at Charlotte Family Housing, we are helping with washers and dryers," Beam said. "One of the things that people don't think about is if you have to put

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